

ag tourism

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To: Olivia Story <olivia.story@co.yakima.wa.us>

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Ms Story,

My name is Felip Holbrook. I am chair of the Government Affairs committee with the Yakima Association of REALTORS®. I was made aware of proposed changes to the regulations surrounding ag tourism in the County. I cannot imagine a more destructive set of changes to what has been the crown jewel of tourism in Yakima. This will immediately destroy scores of family businesses and farms, particularly in the wine industry. These productive citizens have invested decades of work and millions of dollars pursuing their dreams, and are tremendous contributors to the economic and social well-being of our county. The very heavy hand of over-regulation is a gift that keeps on giving, whether discussing housing, medical care, farming – really any economic activity.

Ripple effects will also figure significantly in the restaurant, lodging and travel services industries.

The fact that there is staff available to develop this assault on private enterprise suggests the county has more staff than they can productively use. I suggest you dismiss whoever headed this effort and commit those funds to staffing a Board of Health professional in the Planning Department.

I was for several years deeply involved in the county wine industry while employed at Moss Adams. Tasting rooms, events, and other tourist-related efforts are critical to the success of all of these businesses. It is unimaginable to me that all of this will be sacrificed – and for what? What is the driver for this?

My wife, Leah, and I, as Realtors, facilitated the sale of Windy Point Winery to investors who developed Freehand Cellars. They have committed huge sums and much effort improving and launching that business. It is a tremendous facility with a great plan. The Covid restrictions, however, have already nearly destroyed this effort, and these absurdly restrictive proposed rules will almost certainly complete the destruction.

This scenario will be repeated throughout the county. The only winners will be other counties, like Benton and Walla Walla, where they seem to effortlessly understand how important this economic activity is.

I urge you and the Commissioners in the strongest possible terms to abandon this proposal, and come back with something that actually facilitates success and progress for these hard-working and creative people.

Sincerely,

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